



DECISION MEMO
PRINCE OF WALES CONE COLLECTION
U.S. FOREST SERVICE
THORNE BAY AND CRAIG RANGER DISTRICTS
PRINCE OF WALES ISLAND, ALASKA

BACKGROUND

Seed and cone collections are normally performed in association with timber sales as part of a Sale Area Improvement (SAI) Plan (sometimes referred to as a KV Plan) to support reforestation efforts on harvest areas within the timber sale. Collecting seed cone from trees felled during timber sale operations is not always possible. Timing of falling operations on a timber sale may not coincide with cone crop maturity and availability. A need to collect additional seed cone from areas outside of active timber sales has been identified. Ongoing planting efforts, recent poor germination testing on existing seed caches and intermittent cone crops for some tree species have resulted in a need for additional collections. These additional collections would support research as well as existing and future reforestation efforts. A series of poor cone crops for yellow cedar and germination test failures of existing red cedar seed caches has made these two species a primary target for additional cone collections. Seed caches of other tree species are aging and may also need to be replaced.

Some of the trees selected will need to be cut to access the cone crop while others may be small enough to limb (prune) to obtain the cone from branches. Normally only a few trees per site will be selected for collection and cut trees are generally well dispersed. No reforestation need is anticipated from this project. No trees will be cut in stream buffers and sensitive riparian areas, non-development land use designations, or roadless areas.

DECISION

It is my decision to authorize the pruning or felling of selected trees for collection of up to 30 bushels, per species, of clean cone from individually selected trees located within a few hundred feet of roads. Cone collections would be implemented over a 5 year period starting in the fall of 2016 at such places and times where a good cone crop occurs and is accessible to hand crews. Collections normally occur in late August or September when cones have ripened. Collection sites will be accessed from existing roads and are generally within a few hundred feet of the road.

Trees cut for cone collections are generally small, scattered and few. Material is normally left on site and may be made available to the public as firewood. It is possible that cone collection activities may result in commercial size material as a by-product. In such an occurrence, small salvage sales may be considered but the likelihood of sufficient quality, quantity and concentration of salvage material being made available to support a commercial salvage sale is

low. Trees will not be cut in the following areas on National Forest System lands: within identified roadless areas, within riparian areas, or land use designations where commercial timber harvest is prohibited.

This action is categorically excluded from documentation in an environmental impact statement or an environmental assessment because it is an activity established by the Chief of the Forest Service, which normally does not individually or cumulatively have a significant effect on the quality of the human environment. This category of actions is identified in Forest Service Handbook 1909.15, Chapter 30, Section 31.2 (12) as:

Harvest of live trees not to exceed 70 acres, requiring no more than ½ mile of temporary road construction.

The categorical exclusion is appropriate in this situation because there are no extraordinary circumstances potentially having effects, which may significantly affect the human environment.

Thorne Bay and Craig Ranger District resource specialists were consulted concerning potential environmental consequences. It was determined that no significant environmental impact would result from this project.

Biological Evaluations were completed for sensitive plants. No sensitive species will experience impacts that would cause or contribute to a trend towards federal listing or cause a loss of viability to the population or species.

No extraordinary circumstances exist which would result in additional impacts. No irreversible or irretrievable commitment of resources is anticipated.

I find that there are no extraordinary circumstances that would warrant further analysis and documentation in an EA or EIS. I took into account resource conditions identified in agency procedures that should be considered in determining whether extraordinary circumstances might exist:

- Federally listed threatened or endangered species or designated critical habitat, species proposed for Federal listing or proposed critical habitat, or Forest Service sensitive species –Harvested trees will not impact threatened or endangered species.
- Flood plains, wetlands, or municipal watersheds –Project does not authorize commercial timber harvest in Riparian Management Areas.
- Congressionally designated areas such as wilderness, wilderness study areas, or national recreation areas –Project will not harvest trees in these areas.
- Inventoried roadless areas or potential wilderness areas – Project will not harvest trees in these areas.
- Research natural areas – Project will not harvest trees in these areas.
- American Indians and Alaska Native religious or cultural sites- Project will not harvest trees in these areas.

- Archaeological sites, or historic properties or areas – Project will not harvest trees in these areas.

DESIGN CRITERIA AND MITIGATION

- Soils- Avoid cutting trees on greater than 72% slope, within 50 feet of a new or historic landslide, and trees in wetland areas that do not meet forest plan guidelines.
- Aquatics- Apply Riparian Buffer Standards and Guidelines criteria as outlined in chapter 4 and Appendix D of the January 2008 Tongass Forest Plan. Apply Forest service National Core BMPs and Alaska Region Soil and Water Conservation Handbook, FSH 2409.22.

PUBLIC INVOLVEMENT

This action was originally listed as a proposal on the Tongass National Forest Schedule of Proposed Actions in April, 2016 and updated periodically during the analysis. Scoping was conducted by posting a letter at post offices in Craig, Klawock, Thorne Bay, and Coffman Cove, AK. The scoping period ended on June 17, 2016, and no comments were received.

FINDINGS REQUIRED BY OTHER LAWS AND REGULATIONS

This decision is consistent with the Tongass National Forest Land Management Plan. The project was designed in compliance with 2008 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan and incorporates all applicable Standards and guidelines.

ANILCA Sections 810 and 811, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding

The effects of this project have been evaluated to determine potential effects on subsistence opportunities and resources. There is no documented or reported subsistence use that would be restricted as a result of this decision. For this reason, this action would not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction of subsistence use of wildlife, fish, or other foods.

ANILCA Section 811, Subsistence Evaluation and Finding

There is no documented or reported access that would be restricted as a result of this decision. For this reason, this action would not result in a significant possibility of a significant restriction of subsistence users having reasonable access to subsistence resources on National Forest System Lands.



Endangered Species Act of 1973

A Biological Evaluation has been completed for this action which indicates that no federally listed threatened or endangered species would be affected by this activity.

National Historic Preservation Act of 1966

The Forest Service program for compliance with the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) includes locating, inventorying and evaluating the National Register of Historic Places eligibility of historic and archeological sites that may be directly or indirectly affected by scheduled activities. Regulations (36 CFR 800) implementing Section 106 of the NHPA require Federal agencies to consider the effects of their actions on sites that are determined eligible for inclusion in or are listed in the National Register of Historic Places (termed "historic properties"). A Forest Service archeologist has reviewed this project and we have made a determination of No Historic Properties Affected in the area of potential effect for the proposed project.

Floodplain Management (E.O. 11988), Protection of Wetlands (E.O. 11990)

This activity would not impact the functional value of any floodplain as defined by Executive Order 11988 and would not have negative impacts on wetlands as defined by Executive Order 11990.

Recreational Fisheries (E.O. 12962)

Federal agencies are required, to the extent permitted by law and where practicable, and in cooperation with States and Tribes, to improve the quantity, function, sustainable productivity, and distribution of U.S. aquatic resources for increased recreational fishing opportunities. As required by this Order, I have evaluated the effects of this action on aquatic systems and recreational fisheries and documented those effects relative to the purpose of this order. Since there are no effects to fisheries resources within the project area there will be no direct, indirect or cumulative impacts related to this order.

Environmental Justice (E.O. 12898)

I have determined that, in accordance with Executive Order 12898, this project does not have disproportionately high and adverse human health or environmental effects on minority populations and low income populations.

Invasive Species (E.O.) 13112

Executive Order 13112 directs Federal agencies to identify actions which may affect the status of invasive species; prevent the interdiction of invasive species; detect and rapidly respond to and control populations of such species; monitor invasive species populations; and provide for restoration of native species and habitat conditions in ecosystems that have been invaded. Actions to be taken include planning at the local, tribal, and state level for species that are likely to cause economic or environmental harm on regional and ecosystem levels, in cooperation with



stake holders and organizations dealing with invasive species. Agencies are not to fund or authorize actions that the agency believes are likely to cause or promote the interdiction or spread of invasive species, unless the benefits of the action outweigh the potential harm caused by the species.

An invasive plant risk assessment has been completed for the project, findings and recommendations are incorporated into the project design and decision.

Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act

The Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act requires that all federal agencies consult with the National Marine Fisheries Service when any project “may adversely affect” essential fish habitat (EFH). The Forest Service has determined that this project will not adversely affect EFH.

IMPLEMENTATION DATE

Implementation may occur immediately.

CONTACT

For additional information concerning this decision, contact:

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Matthew D. Anderson
District Ranger

Date



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APPENDIX A- PROJECT LOCATION MAPS

POW Cone Collection 2016



